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O'Notes • Summer 2002

Letter From The Editor

I wish somebody would push back the clock for me.

—Bob Dylan, "Highlands"

The more I think about it, the more Bob Dylan's line from his great 1997 album *Time Out of Mind* speaks to me about my own attitude toward comic books. Quite simply, comics exist in the past for me.

My meager, motley collection has the power (and the smell!) to take me from six to sixteen; from when I bought my first comic to the day I foolishly sold my original (and glorious) original collection for that new stereo I just had to have.

While I am cursed to troll Ahab-like through the buck-a-book bins for a collection I will never recover, I hope *you* are secure enough to enjoy the great imagination and storytelling present in many, but not all, of today's comics. (*Now* is a lot like *then* in that respect.) If you are, please click on over to www.shootingstarcomics.com and order yourself a copy of *Shooting Star* #1.

Produced as an "independent" comic by close to twenty noted fan talents (and Dixonverse regulars) including our own Scott McCullar, as well as Sarah Beach, Lance Stahlberg, and J. Morgan Neal, SS #1 stands at eighty glorious black and white pages for just $5.95. Turn on to pure creative ambition before some of these folks are gobbled-up and corrupted by the pros.

One other issue I have with comics is that as a 43-year-old citizen of the "real world," I spend a lot of time away from them; and in this, ahem, *interesting* period we all live in, more time than usual. I try like hell to stay close to my family and friends and to contribute to causes that are important to me. I hope you do the same. Remember folks, a near mint copy of anything will only take you so far in this life. Also, I hope you understand I am just like you when it comes to my passion for the magic of comics. When I am "in the zone," comic books are transcendent to me.

Now let's buckle-up, enjoy, and get on with the comic stuff!

I'd like to thank Scott, John Wells, and Lou Mougin for making this special cyber-issue possible and I'll see you in the hard copy *O'Neil Observer/Destination Cool!* #5 some time in October.

Bob Bradshaw

SHOOTING STAR COMICS ANTHOLOGY #1

(Sarah Beach, David Bock, Erik Burnham, Mariano De La Torre, Chuck Dixon, JP Dupras, Todd Fox, Scott McCullar, J. Morgan Neal, Terry Pallot, Gordon Purcell, Scott Rogers, Lance Stahlberg, Sean Taylor, Carlin Trammel, Enrique Villagran, Bill Wiist)

With a Special Introduction by Denny O'Neil – Featuring eleven original stories by nine writers, these stories cover a wide array of genres and taste. Find tales of Action and Adventure with *Tsalosha, Aym Geronimo and the Post Modern Pioneers* and stories of costumed heroes with *Fishnet Angel, Bedbug, The Defender, Yellow Jacket* and the *Emerald Mantis*. Some off-the-beaten path tales also come to you with *Nick Landime* and *Mike Von Fange*. This 80 Page Giant also gives readers the much-anticipated original Western Tale by Chuck Dixon (*Birds of Prey, Way of the Rat*) and Enrique Villagran. Cover by Steve Lieber (*Detective Comics*).

Shooting Star Comics | 80 pg. BW | $5.95 US ($6.95 Can) November 6, 2002

Dear Miki...

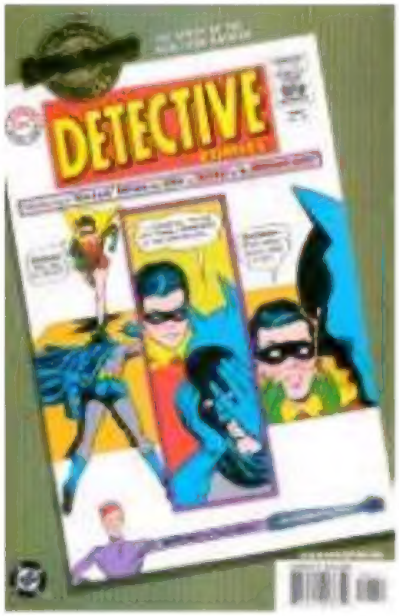
From June 24 through August 5, I've guest-written Bob Rozakis' weekly on-line Answerman column at www.silverbulletcomicbooks.com. Some of the questions in those columns were provided to me by Bob while others were recycled from queries that were originally made directly to me — in my on-line handle of "Mikishawm." And there are plenty more such questions in my archives, enough that I decided to dig out a few more of them for this special on-line edition of **ONO**. Hopefully, they'll reveal something that you didn't know before.

*[In reading the **Batman: Strange Apparitions** collection of stories from 1977 & 1978, I noticed that there were footnotes to Golden Age Batman stories like those from **Batman** # 1 & 59 and **Detective Comics** # 31 & 46. Was that unusual for the series ?]*

I think the general consensus in the 1960s and 1970s was that all the Batman stories from 1939 onwards (with appropriate updating) *were* part of Earth-One continuity. Writers routinely referred to Golden Age stories when they revived old villains — Gardner Fox with the Scarecrow, Denny O'Neil with Two-Face, Steve Englehart with Hugo Strange and Deadshot and Gerry Conway with the first Mad Hatter. Editor Julius Schwartz was, by this point, well aware of the new generation of fans' interest in maintaining consistent continuity and characterization [He'd gotten in trouble immediately by having Batman hold a gun on some crooks at the end of **Detective** # 327] and the frequent footnotes to past issues was an acknowledgement of that.

In the early 1980s, a rather absurd new edict declared that the Earth-One Batman didn't debut until the first issue edited by Schwartz, 1964's **Detective** # 327, ignoring Batman's regular team appearances in **Justice League of America** and **World's Finest** that dated back to the 1950s and the revivals of multiple 1940s and 1950s characters like Batwoman, Bat-Girl, Carter Nichols, Vicki Vale, et al. It was at this point that Gerry Conway began introducing *new* versions of Golden Age villains (like Doctor Death and the Monk) rather than reviving them as had been done in the past.

As the Time Trust has pointed out, one has to approach each character's continuity individually. There are a multitude of significant differences between the Golden Age Superman and Wonder Woman and their Silver Age counterparts but the same doesn't apply to Batman for a very important reason — the original creators, particularly Bill Finger, remained with the character without interruption until the late 1960s, by which point there were enough people (like E. Nelson Bridwell) who cared about continuity that they were able to maintain Finger's history after he'd left.



Detective Comics #327 (Millennium Edition)
Written by John Broome. Art by Carmine Infantino and Joe Giella

The "new look" Silver Age Batman (featuring a yellow oval around the bat-symbol on his chest) was introduced in this 1964 issue, which also features the first appearance of the Elongated Man (written by John Broome and illustrated by Carmine Infantino).

underwent massive change as the 1950s wore on, so many that one almost never saw Clark or Diana recall an adventure that took place in a 1940s comic. By the time Jerry Siegel returned to Superman, his original continuity had been completely painted over by Mort Weisinger's own panorama.

The nice thing about the current Batman continuity is that one can *still* retain many, many of the old Batman stories in the tapestry with only modest updating. Not every writer in the past couple decades has agreed and that's their prerogative but I appreciate the folks who've taken the past into account in their scripts. Rich Morrissey said as much to me in a letter dated July 25, 1996 and I think he deserves to have the last word:

"My own opinion on Batman continuity (or DC continuity in general) differs to a large extent from the revisionism continually pushed by certain people at DC (less Denny O'Neil, who usually fudges such things, than his various assistants). I'm inclined to think the creators of a character or series have the last word, so I usually accept a Batman story by Bill Finger and/or Bob Kane over one by Frank Miller or Chuck Dixon, just as I'd consider a Sherlock Holmes story by Arthur Conan Doyle more binding than one by August Derleth or Nicholas Meyer. Especially since most of the changes made in Batman (as opposed to the outright reboots of Superman or Wonder Woman ... I can't take any continuity seriously that claims none of the stories about Batman and the original Robin published over 40 years to be binding) can be worked together in one way or other. I've found that, by taking the stories as published and trying to incorporate as many as possible, they still work. I've never understood the revision of so many stories, anyway."

****

[I have a vague recollection that Marvel intended to launch a new Champions series in the late 1970s as a spin-off from ***Nova.*** *Is that true ? And what were the names of the New Champions ?]*

I'm not sure if Marv Wolfman was actually planning to do a New Champions comic but, in an old article in **Comics Feature** # 21, Murray Ward commented "had **Nova** persisted beyond its 25th issue (*1979*), the magazine might have been re-titled **Nova and the New Champions**." I think that was just his opinion, though; I don't know that there were any plans to do so. Anyway, the members were the Comet, Crime-Buster, Diamondhead and Powerhouse. Marv continued the story in 1979's **Fantastic Four** # 206, 208 and 209 (actually calling them the New Champions in # 208) and Bill Mantlo concluded the story in **Rom** # 24 (*1981*) with the return of Rich Ryder to Earth. Rich's reunion with his family actually took place in **What If ?** # 36 (*1982*), believe it or not, in a framing sequence around an imaginary tale.

****

[If ***Detective Comics*** *began as a monthly in 1937 and* ***Action Comics*** *began as a monthly in 1938, why is* ***Action****'s numbering in 790s the while* ***Detective****'s is in the 770s ?]*

Action Comics # 1 and **Detective Comics** # 16 were both dated June, 1938 and **'Tec** maintained its fifteen issue lead into the 1960s. **Action** managed to shave four issues off that between 1966 and 1969 thanks to being published twice a month during the publication of each of the Supergirl 80-Page Giants (# 334, 347, 360, 373). In the 1970s, the lead date on DC's titles was revived so *all* DC comics skipped the May, 1973 issue. When **'Tec** returned with # 435, it had been reduced to bi-monthly status (June-July, 1973) and **Action** caught up within a matter of months.

Detective returned to monthly frequency with # 446 (April, 1975), the same month that **Action** caught up with it! The two books bore identical numbers for the next fifteen months, ending with issue # 467, when **'Tec** was again reduced to bi-monthly frequency. During Steve Englehart's run (# 469-476), **'Tec** was temporarily expanded to eight times a year but it was too late. **Action** had the lead. By the time **'Tec** returned to monthly frequency with # 489 (April, 1980), **Action** was seventeen issues ahead at issue # 506.

Action took a three-month vacation between Julius Schwartz's last issue (# 583: September, 1986) and John Byrne's first (# 584: January, 1987). All of these frequency stunts resulted in the fortuitous end result that **Action** # 600 (May, 1988) coincided exactly with Superman's 50th Anniversary!

Thanks to the 42 weekly issues that followed # 600 (ending with an issue published alongside March, 1989-dated issues), **Action** expanded its lead significantly enough

that **'Tec** didn't have a prayer of ever catching up (or so it seemed). After its post-**Weekly** hiatus, **Action** returned with # 643 (dated July, 1989), published the same month as **'Tec** # 602.

Taking advantage of Batmania, **Detective** had annual spells of twice-monthly frequency in 1989 (# 604-607), 1990 (# 617-620), 1991 (# 631-636), 1992 (# 647-652) and 1993 (# 659-664). Meanwhile, **Action** took a three-month hiatus thanks to the consequences of the "death" of Superman in 1993 (between # 686 and 687) but gained a month back when # 687 and 688 were both released with July, 1993-dated books. As of the December, 1993 books, **Action** was at # 694 and **Detective** at # 669, 25 issues behind.

Since then, **Action** has missed four months — May, 1995 (between # 709 & 710), February, 1998 (between # 741 & 742), October, 1998 (between # 748 and the One Million issue) and June, 1999 (between # 754 & 755) — while **Detective** has maintained uninterrupted monthly frequency.

All of which serves to explain how a monthly that started in March of 1937 is now 21 issues *behind* the numbering of a monthly that debuted in June of 1938.

****

[1) In the DCU, it's common knowledge that Barry Allen died in an event known as The Crisis. But there were also other heroes who died, such as Aquagirl, Kole, Dove, Lori Lemaris. Are they remembered as dying in The Crisis also? Or did they just never exist? And if they never existed, then why is Allen remembered but not them?]

All the heroes listed above (and the others) *are* remembered as dying during the Great Crisis. Taking them one at a time:

a) Aquagirl was mourned by Aqualad in 1986's **New Teen Titans** # 20-21 and her murder was recalled when Chemo was created in 1987's **Action Comics** # 590. Aqualad was supposed to have found a new love in Neal Pozner and Craig Hamilton's unrealized second **Aquaman** mini-series but that wasn't meant to be. 1996's **Tempest** mini-series recalled Aquagirl's death once more even as it seemed to restore Tula to life. In the final issue, Aquagirl turned out to have been a reanimated corpse.

b) Kole, the character Marv Wolfman created specifically so that a member of the Titans could die in **Crisis On Infinite Earths**, was mourned in 1986's **New Teen Titans** # 18. She appeared to have returned from the grave in 1993's **Team Titans** # 8 and 10-12 but was later said to have been a pawn of Monarch (# 24).

c) Dove's death continued to haunt Hawk throughout the subsequent mini-series and ongoing series. Hank even went so far as to try to bring his brother's spirit back in 1991's **Hawk & Dove** # 25-28 only to learn that he'd been duped into resurrecting the Flash's old foe, the Top. Issue # 5 of the 1988 mini-series revealed that Don Hall died in the first place because his powers were pulled away from him by a Lord of Order and a Lord of Chaos at the moment before he was struck by shadow-demons. Those powers were then transferred to Dawn Granger in London, who became the new Dove.

d) In 1987's **Superman** # 12, Superman and Lori's husband, Ronal, reflected on Lori's life on the first anniversary of her death. In 1991's **Superman** # 63, though, it was revealed (but not to Clark) that Lori had survived and insisted that Ronal tell Superman that she'd died in the Crisis Lori had done it all for the sake of Superman's happiness, convinced that Clark would never pursue a relationship with Lois Lane unless he believed she was dead. "But I've paid the price of your happiness," Lori thought as she watched Clark's ship sail away. "For you are, truly, the only man I will ever love." Lori was finally reunited with Clark in 1996's **Adventures of Superman** # 532, wherein it was revealed that Ronal had been corrupted by a magical staff that had unwittingly altered Lori: On land, her fishtail transformed into legs. As Lois Lane put it, "Wet — mermaid. Dry — human. Very Hollywood ..." Lori remained a recurring character in the Superman books until Lois and Clark's marriage and continues to pop up from time to time, most recently in **Justice League of Atlantis** # 1.

*[2) Did injuries sustained during **Crisis** carry over into the unified Earth (I'm thinking about Wildcat's leg injury here)?]*

Yes, both the wheelchair-restricted Wildcat and the burned Hawkman were still recovering in 1986's **Infinity, Inc.** # 25. They made speedy recoveries, though —

Wildcat was back on his feet by **II** # 29 — so that the entire Justice Society could be active when they were sent into limbo later that year in **Last Days of the Justice Society Special** # 1.

[3) At the end of the final book, heroes are shown mourning for fallen comrades from other Earth's (like Batman mourning the Earth-2 Robin and Huntress). But in the epilogue, Psycho-Pirate is revealed to be the only person who remembers the Infinite Earths. Was the heroes' memories of the fallen something that faded away after time?]

In the current DCU, everyone remembers the Great Crisis as an event in which the Anti-Monitor and forces from Qward invaded the positive universe. Only the Psycho-Pirate recalls a different set of circumstances that involved infinite earths.

Initially, though, the heroes who were at the dawn of time in **Crisis** # 10 did remember the multiple Earths. As I explained way back in 1987's **Justice League of America Index** # 8:

"Overwhelming evidence suggests that the reformation of history in the wake of **Crisis** occurred in two phases, not one. For example, characters such as Superman, Captain Marvel and Captain Atom, who initially seemed not to have been affected, have since been significantly altered. Likewise, the members of Infinity, Inc., who initially remembered the Superman, Batman and Wonder Woman of Earth-2, have since forgotten them. The second phase of the reformation apparently took place after Aphrodite (in **Legends of Wonder Woman** # 4) and Mekanique (as seen in **All-Star Squadron** # 60) stopped holding back the fill effects of the Crisis."

Psycho-Pirate's memories seem to come and go. His first appearance after **Crisis** was in 1986's **Infinity, Inc.** # 31 and 32, where it was explained that Jonni Thunder's evil Thunderbolt had banished his "muttering about multiverses and infinite Earths" by giving him her "own personal brand of shock therapy." Thanks to Brainwave, Jr. and Looker, he went back over the edge in 1987's **Infinity, Inc. Special** # 1 and was babbling about continuity and infinite earths in 1989's **Animal Man** # 10 and 20. This built into "Crisis II" in 1990's **Animal Man** # 22-24, which climaxed with the Psycho-Pirate fading into thin air (he was "written out of continuity") and replaced in his cell by John Highwater. Of course, **Animal Man** # 26 revealed that most of the past several issues had been a dream so it was remains unclear just what was *really* happened to the Pirate.

He was back in Arkham Asylum in 1995's **Manhunter** # 11, where he asked Neron for the gift of sanity and ended up becoming a kind of psychic vampire, stealing the sanity of others for himself in # 12. The Psycho-Pirate also got a thoroughly hideous costume redesign, which may explain why no one has seen him since. He was *heard* from in 2000's **JLA 80-Page Giant** # 3, though. With all of reality in a state of ... um ... crisis, there was "a drastic spike in mental aberrations everywhere" and Arkham left a message for Batman to contact them about the Pirate. Subsequently transferred to the Slab, Hayden was again insisting that "there are other earths" (**Joker: Last Laugh Secret Files** # 1) before being Joker-ized and escaping (**Joker: Last Laugh** # 3).

[4) Have Pariah, Lady Quark or Lyla shown up in the DCU since the Crisis ended?]

Yes. All three showed up in 1986's **DC Comics Presents** # 94, in which Lady Quark found the interim-Earth equivalent of her husband and discovered that he was a super-villain. That story faded away after the second phase of the new Earth's history was in place. After that, Lady Quark was said to have come from another planet that was destroyed in Crisis (**Starman** [*first series*] # 8). She went on to join L.E.G.I.O.N. (in # 13, 16-18 of that series) and was attacked and left for dead by a parasitic shape-changer in **L.E.G.I.O.N.** # 62-63. The parasite was exposed and killed in # 70 while the original Lady Quark is still presumed dead.

Lyla, as Harbinger, went on to write **The History of the DC Universe**, which fell into the hands of the Manhunters and led to **Millennium**. After that, Harbinger was a member of the New Guardians (from **Teen Titans Spotlight** # 19 to **Green Lantern** [*current*] # 35). Meanwhile, Pariah surfaced again during **Invasion!** # 2 and **War of the Gods** # 1-4, now named Mossa instead of Kell. Both Pariah and Harbinger, said to have been "researching the nature of space and time," have since appeared in 2000's **JLA 80-Page Giant** # 3. Harbinger recently accepted an invitation from the Amazons to resume her chronicles of the DC Universe's complex history (2002's **Wonder Woman Secret Files** # 3).

DC AFTER 1971: WHAT HAPPENED?

By Lou Mougin

In 1971, DC was riding high. They still had market share over Marvel, they were drawing in the attention of the national media with the Green Lantern / Green Arrow series, they had snared Jack Kirby from Marvel and riveted the attention of fandom with the Fourth World tetralogy, they'd acquired Tarzan, Korak, and other Edgar Rice Burroughs properties, they were revamping Superman, and Batman was at a creative peak with the frequent appearances of the O'Neil / Adams team and other worthies like Robbins, Brown, and Novick. Even Supergirl and Wonder Woman were showing vigor, thanks to the work of Mike Sekowsky. DC's 25-cent, 52-page size enabled them to introduce new readers to the wonders of the Golden Age.

By 1972, the books were back to 20 cents, GL / GA was cancelled, Tarzan was just another comic book, Superman had slouched back into mediocrity, Batman was still hanging on, and the Fourth World, except for Mr. Miracle, was being replaced by the likes of Kamandi and the Demon.

And Marvel, for the first time in history, had bypassed DC in sales.

What happened?

Even today, it's hard to put analysis to it, especially from the perspective of an outsider. The major reason for Marvel's overtaking DC, of course, was Martin Goodman's canny scaling-back from big 25-centers to small 20-cent books after a month, which left DC with large, costlier dinosaurs. But one of the problems may have been the apparent lack of faith Carmine Infantino, DC's publisher, had with the innovations he himself approved.

Taking it back to 1968, the year Infantino took charge, we saw a plethora of titles cancelled, many in the wake of the ill-fated union organization attempt of DC's writers: Blackhawk, Rip Hunter, Sea Devils, etc. We also saw a similar amount of new titles produced, many quite good, most imitating Marvel's character-driven stories, most of them edited by Charlton acquisition Dick Giordano: Hawk and the Dove, Creeper, Bat Lash, Bomba, Anthro, the Secret Six, the Geek, plus revamps on most of DC's mainstay titles in one form or another by Charlton talent or the new artistic messiah, Neal Adams.

All the aforementioned titles lasted less than ten issues.

It's probable that the new titles dragged in a lot of curious Marvelites who previously shunned the DC mainstream. Two new titles by Steve Ditko were intriguing to old Spider-Man and Dr. Strange fans, and Deadman was a burgeoning fan-favorite even before Carmine lay down his pencil. But, apparently, they didn't bring in the Big Bucks fast enough. And instead of keeping the books going a little longer to see if they could find an audience, Carmine chopped them.

Contrast this to Marvel's treatment of Conan, a couple of years later: the book didn't do particularly well in its early issues, being quite out of the mold for Marvel, and was even cancelled once for a short time until Roy Thomas got it back on the boards. It found its niche quickly thereafter, and, by the mid-Seventies, was one of Marvel's powerhouses, with a giant-size edition, a regular black-and-white mag, and numerous spinoffs in addition to the regular 32-page comic. True, Marvel had more than its share of casualties. But it sustained itself better in the post-1971 era than DC.

Another problem may have been DC's editorial attitude. The old regime at the company, in particular Mort Weisinger (who was retired by '71) and Julie Schwartz, simply weren't comfortable with the character-driven story approach of Marvel. For Schwartz, it was usually plot, plot, plot, with Kirbyesque action at a minimum, no matter how much Gil Kane pleaded for it. Writers such as Denny O'Neil and Steve Skeates, who weren't trained by Julie, brought a fresher sensibility to their books. Writers who were schooled by Mort or Julie, such as Bates or Maggin,

rarely rose above the competent. They weren't bad, but they didn't scintillate.

Compare that to the writer-driven powerhouse of Marvel's Second Generation Bullpen, with names like Thomas, Englehart, Gerber, McGregor, Starlin, and Moench, all of them weaned on Stan Lee stuff, and one can see why DC's fan base suffered.

All too often, Infantino seemed to back down even from the changes that might have worked. Once Denny O'Neil was off of Superman (by his own request), the fresher characterization he had brought to the Man of Steel was scrapped in favor of plot-driven conventionality. Batman continued under O'Neil for some years, and, as a result, did much better in creative terms, though it fell into mediocrity under other hands. Once the Kirby Fourth World books were wrapped up (save for Mr. Miracle, who lost the Apokolips mythos after the cancellation of NEW GODS and FOREVER PEOPLE, until his last issue), Darkseid and company basically dropped off the radar screen until circa 1975. Stalwart JLA'ers such as Aquaman, Atom, Hawkman, Green Lantern, and Green Arrow lost their books, only to appear in the team comic or in backup stories. THE FLASH became one of the blandest books in the line. Occasional bits of brilliance came up in the form of THE SHADOW and SWAMP THING, but one was cancelled and the other lost its initial creative team and was soon lost altogether. Pointless revivals of old titles like CHALLENGERS OF THE UNKNOWN and TEEN TITANS dotted the late-70's landscape, and an attempt to imitate Marvel's barbarian line, except for WARLORD, went bust.

By contrast, DC's war books, which few paid attention to in fandom, remained quite readable throughout the decade. Archie Goodwin, Joe Kubert, Bob Kanigher, Frank Robbins, Russ Heath, Sam Glanzman, John Severin, and all the rest churned out quality material that frequently outpointed the hero books. JONAH HEX, under Michael Fleisher, built itself into a quality Western feature and eventually peaked with the classic "Death of Jonah Hex" special, one of the greatest Western tales in all of comics. Even DC's mystery / horror books, whatever their flaws, hung on consistently through the 70's.

Murray Boltinoff, a usually-overlooked DC editor, provided one of the innovations of the 70's that really worked: the revival of the Legion of Super-Heroes. After the LSH was dumped out of ADVENTURE, a book they'd sustained from 1962-68, to provide a slot for Supergirl, they'd been shunted to a back-of-the-book feature in ACTION and then phased out in favor of a second Superman story after Weisinger's retirement. Then Boltinoff quietly began bringing the Legion back, in the pages of SUPERBOY, with better art and writing. The feature, with its already–primed legion of super-fans, built and built until the logo announced that Superboy would have to share the entire comic with the Legionnaires. From then until now, years after the original Superboy's cancellation, the Legion has survived.

If it had been under a more conventional editor, it might not have.

Also, if DC had a system of demographic analysis of its comics, it might have been less eager to trim some of its titles. As any advertising exec can tell you, it isn't just how many people you're reaching, it's what kind. Titles such as NEW GODS and GL / GA may not have sold as many issues as SUPERMAN, but they were bought by a substantially higher audience of late teens and college-agers. Advertising slanted at the latter group might have borne fruit, as might a different format. But DC eschewed college-age marketing, flatly stating in a business ad that they "didn't want" college-age readers because they didn't buy the products advertised in comics.

Which might have had something to do with the products that were advertised in comics.

As the story goes, NBC might not have cancelled STAR TREK if its demographics had come into play a year earlier. Captain Kirk and company never brought down a big audience, but the kind of audience they brought in, the youth market, was something the network was specifically hoping to acquire. The franchise that has resulted since gives the lie to too-simplistic analysis of the data.

Carmine Infantino shouldn't be blasted for Everything Bad That Happened, to be sure...he made the experiments, which took quite a bit of courage and verve. But one can't hope but wonder what would have happened if he'd stuck by the changes he'd instituted for a little longer. Either in 1969 or 1971, he might have found himself with a batch of winners, rather than some failed experiments that ended up being dumped down the sink.

But that's all history, like it or not.

◐

LOU MOUGIN has written numerous articles about comics over the years and scripted a handful of comics stories for Marvel, Eclipse, and others. Look for a new feature, ***Ghost Justice****, out for Blue Moon sometime soon.*

Richard Morrissey:

MAN OF LETTERS

A Compilation of Letters Written by Richard Morrisse

Compiled by John Wells

Part Two-and-a-Half

I've admired Rich Morrissey's comics knowledge, writing and general good will for virtually the entire time that I've been reading DC comics. His letters never failed to catch my attention and his name in a message board post was cause for celebration. The discovery of one of his articles in a magazine (particularly my "home" 'zine, **It's A Fanzine***) was a special thrill and always a guarantee of a new insight or historical detail that I'd never considered or known about. He was one of the giants of comics fandom and, despite his dissatisfaction with many developments of the past several years, he never turned away from the new generations of fans, generously providing information to them as folks like editor/writer E. Nelson Bridwell had done for him. His death on May 22, 2001 — at the far-too-young age of — came as a shock to all who knew him.*

The sampling below continues our representation of his letters from over the years (continuing a series seen in **ONO** *# 3 and 4).*

***"Amazing World of Letters"* — The Amazing World of DC Comics** # 7 (*July, 1975*):

Although I think it is highly overrated by many fans, the Marvel group is definitely superior to DC in at least one regard — the matter of mutual continuity.

It's true that the situation has greatly improved at DC within the past decade or so. There was a time when the Aquaman stories presented the inhabitants of Atlantis as simple water-breathing humans while the Superman stories showed them as mermen and mermaids, without a word of explanation or reconciliation — even though both characters were handled by the same editor! (Of course, now we know there are at least two Atlantean races — though I still can't think of any recent story in which the two races have appeared together.) Whereas now, it is not at all uncommon to see the Guardians of the Universe appear in **Superman** or Felix Faust battling Wonder Woman.

But in a way, this sort of thing only makes any lack of continuity that much worse. In the early '60s, it was very rare for any DC hero to meet another outside the pages of **Justice League**, **Brave & Bold** or **World's Finest**, so it was easy for even someone who read all their adventures to forget, while reading about one hero, to forget that any others existed on his world. He can no longer do that! Crossovers, though not overused to Marvel's outrageous extent, are relatively common — so continuity done in half measures is worse than none at all.

I'd like to see a real effort made to make Earth-One, like the Marvel-Earth, a logical, consistent world — who lives there, and who lives on Earth-Two, Earth-X, etc. should be firmly established. If the Phantom Stranger is to team with Batman, for example, and hold semi-honorary membership in the JLA, his sidekick, Dr. Thirteen, should not be allowed to refer to The Flash as a comic book character. It should be decided whether Plastic Man is living (or dead ?) on Earth-One, Earth-Two, Earth-X or all the above. Personally, I think characters which are not basically serious (like Plas and Captain Marvel) should be left off Earth-One.

Unfortunately, Murray Boltinoff, who as **Brave & Bold** editor must play an important role in determining how the various DC heroes relate with one another, is on record as saying (in **B&B** # 119) that he "avoids the Earth-One/Two theme to make the stories clear and concise." They are anything *but* clear and concise to those of us who find it difficult to understand why the Batman teaming with Wildcat would have a yellow circle around his insignia!

But the most outrageous and unexplained concept has to be the "Super-Sons" in **World's Finest.** Bob

Richard Morrissey:
MAN OF LETTERS

Haney insists that the stories aren't imaginary tales of the future. Nor can they be taking place on Earth-Two, what with Aquaman and the Earth-One versions of Green Arrow, Flash and Robin (still in college, unbelievably enough) on the scene!

A number of your other characters, especially those unfortunate enough to lack a permanent editor, are also in a sorry state. Deadman was the best thing DC had going, in continuity and other notable aspects. Until suddenly, Jack Kirby, Bob Haney and Arnold Drake all decided to take him in their own directions, with little or no attention paid to what had been established previously. Boston Brand found himself more or less in continuous occupation of two different bodies and the question of who his murderer was, though seemingly settled, was reopened in a most ridiculous way.

And then there's the Spectre. In fine shape under Julius Schwartz, he was badly treated by Dick Giordano — and Denny O'Neil must have been asleep when he wrote the story which killed the Astral Avenger in action in **JLA** But despite the quibbles, Giordano and O'Neil maintained some semblance of continuity — which Joe Orlando and Michael Fleisher didn't even *try* to do! If it was the intention of Orlando and Fleisher to create a new Spectre, they should have done so, giving him a new origin and secret identity. As it was, the reader had little choice but to identify him with the Ghostly Guardian of Earth-Two or to speculate on who he was and on what Earth he lived. The references to Clark Kent and Superman by people in the stories make it possible to believe *this* Spectre lives on neither Earths One or Two.

Ironically, DC did begin to fully embrace "the matter of mutual continuity" in the 1980s only to have it culminate with the controversial ***Crisis On Infinite Earths*** *mini-series that effectively erased Earth-One, Earth-Two and much of their history from existence. Particularly difficult for Rich to tolerate was John Byrne's revamping of Superman, something that future installments of this series will focus on. In the post-Crisis universe, Rich found Batman far more palatable, a character whose revamping was more subtle and less exclusionary. Some of Rich's expectations from a Batman story were laid down in the 1975 letter re-printed below:*

"Batman's Hot Line" — **Detective Comics** # 456 (*February, 1976*):

The past decade has seen a tremendous influx of brilliant young writers into the comics industry who have worked wonders with your newer heroes — but with The Batman, perhaps a more experienced hand is needed. The consistent quality in his case has been maintained by the older, veteran writers. The newcomers have produced some excellent, original classics, but they tend to concentrate on characterization. A Batman story should be primarily plot-oriented, with characterization, except on rare occasions, very subtle and subordinate.

That's exactly what we got from David V. Reed in **Detective** # 452 with *"Crackdown on the Crime Exchange!"* His Batman stories have not been classics, but they have been good, solid tales with strong plots and original adversaries for The Batman. In short, it was the sort of story that kept Batman a successful and popular character throughout the Golden Age and hopefully will continue to do so today.

Detective Comics #452
[© DC Comics]

The Ernie Chua/Mike Royer art team did much better than on their previous collaborations. All of a sudden, Royer has turned into a rival for Murphy Anderson.

In our next installment: a glimpse of Rich as he works towards a law degree.

◐

You'll believe a man can "THWIP!"

by John Wells

Everybody seemed to be expecting ***Star Wars*** to be the big hit of the summer.

There was saturation coverage of ***Harry Potter*** and ***Attack of the Clones*** on TV and in print before those films were released. You couldn't avoid hearing about 'em. But in ***Spider-Man***'s case, the news reports didn't kick into high gear until *after* the movie had broken records and was actually *news* (What a concept!). Even at the retail store where I work, our manager had been insisting since April that we needed to prepare to capitalize on the ***Star Wars*** movie but was pretty much oblivious to Spidey.

Marvel couldn't have planned something this fitting: A big-budget sure-to-be-a-success movie that managed to come across as an underdog!

And I'm happy to report that it's as good as everyone says it is, one of my five personal all-time favorite superhero movies. [The other four, for the record, are **The Rocketeer, The Iron Giant, Superman: The Movie** and **Batman: Mask of the Phantasm** ... with **The Phantom, Superman II** and the Keaton-Nicholson **Batman** bringing up the rear.] As I'd anticipated, it put Spidey's official history in a blender and swirled it around real good but the movie is absolutely true to the spirit of the 1960s series. I was surprised at how many situations and relationships from the comics were in place here, pleased at the expected developments that *didn't* happen ... and thrilled at how many individual bits are straight out of the comic book.

Spider-Man
© Marvel Comics

Tobey Maguire is every bit as good as I expected him to be. He has a nerdy squeek to his voice and the sympathetic, sarcastic personality that Peter Parker *has* to have. It was so cool to hear those classic wise-cracks come out of Spidey's mouth and sound completely natural and unscripted.

Some have ranted about what a horrible idea it was to cast a 26-year-old as a teenager and I was just as insistent that, based on **Pleasantville**, Maguire would be perfect and *looked* the right age. Obviously, I've been proven right but ... in his first scene, Maguire is wearing glasses and has a been-shaving-for-years gray cast to his face that screamed "Not a teenager!" Luckily, Maguire sells you on Peter

the bad things that are said and done to her rather than trying to establish her as a three-dimensional character in her own right. There was an interesting parental conflict subplot that might've gone somewhere but it was dropped early on. [Peter David, happily, deals with it in the novelization — well worth reading for this and other emotional scenes not including in the film.] The fact that I ended up liking MJ as much as I did is, I think, entirely due to Kirsten Dunst. She gives everything she's got to a pretty thin role. (I'll admit that, when the unnamed but, thanks to her mid-1960s hairdo, completely recognizable Betty Brant met Peter, I *really* wanted him to ask *her* out on a date.)

And then there's the villain. Some of the Green Goblin's lines are so arch, so completely over-the-top in script and delivery, that I actually cringed a couple times and wondered why *every* villain in a super-hero movie had to be a cackling throwback to the mustache-twirling bad guys of old. And, almost immediately, I answered myself with the observation that most of the Goblin's scenes *work* (although his metal costume is the one big failing in the movie) and that he comes across as an infinitely better villain than anyone in the big budget Batman flicks.

Willem Dafoe actually manages to pull off the type of role that confounds a lot of big-name, otherwise gifted actors and does so from the beginning. With those few exceptions that I mentioned, Dafoe had established himself as such a vivid, rounded character as Norman Osborn that you can fully accept his outgrowth as the melodramatic Goblin. In his first couple scenes with Peter, I actually felt regret that they were going to become mortal enemies.

Cliff Robertson and Rosemary Harris as Ben and May Parker — perfect, sympathetic characters. And despite very little screen time, Robertson makes you really care about Ben. And there's a moment between Harris and Maguire following Pete's graduation that actually made a little misty.

And the Burglar (well, he isn't actually a burglar but that's what they've always called him) — this was absolutely brilliant. The pivotal scene where Peter lets him escape is almost exactly as it was in the comic. But there's a flourish that puts an entirely different spin on it, causing the audience to let its guard down and making what eventually happens so much more awful. It was fascinating watching this in the theatre and listening to pretty much everyone laugh. "Geez," I thought, "They have no idea what's coming."

J.K. Simmons as J. Jonah Jameson. Man... Jonah could *not* have been translated from the comics any better than this. He has the same bizarre crew cut and attitude (missing only the Hitler mustache.) He only has two scenes but they're both absolutely killer! What's really great is that the script resists turning JJJ into a complete cartoon, giving him some integrity and backbone that could have easily been sacrificed for a cheap laugh.

When **Spider-Man** was reviewed in the *Chicago Tribune*, the writer raved about it but said that they'd pretty much exhausted the characters' potential. Based in particular on the last scene in the movie, I've got to disagree. If they try to build off the situations at the end of the movie to do a direct sequel, the second movie *could* be a disaster — but I'm hoping that, as took place a few times in this film, the obvious path will not be taken. There's lots of stuff to be resolved between Harry and Peter and MJ and, if the Spidey franchise is gonna succeed, it's going to have to focus on these three ... with support from May and JJJ and more, different three-dimensional villains.

◐

Mining the Golden Age:

BLACKHAWK

IN MILITARY AND MODERN COMICS

by DarkMark

The Quality Blackhawks were not the DC Blackhawks.

The DC Blackhawks could have adventures on the Island of Super_Monkeys, gain super_powers, and fight aliens and space monsters and villains like The Hoopster and Mr. Quick_Change.

The Quality Blackhawks were out to kill the Axis and that's just what they did.

They were seven men, sometimes nine, in blue_black uniforms with a bird of prey symbol on their chests. They flew the deadliest war planes they could get their hands on. They didn't play games with their Nazi opponents. When they faced the enemy in combat, they killed them. And that was that.

Now, it may seem incongruous after this to suggest that the Blackhawk stories also contained elements of humor, goodwill, cameraderie, romance (even sex) and tenderness. But they did, and we'll tell you all about them.

The early Blackhawk strips alone make the issues of Military Comics worth going after. But there were other good features in the book, including The Sniper, the Death Patrol, Secret War News, Will Bragg, Torchy, and even a one_shot appearance of The Spirit.

It's time Military Comics, which became Modern Comics after World War II, was thoroughly assessed.

Military Comics was produced in 1941, scant months before Pearl Harbor. In Europe, World War II had been going on for about two years. Many of the people making American comics were New York Jews. None of them liked the Nazis very much.

One of these guys was Will Eisner. He was the editor of Military Comics for the first 11 issues, and he helped create Blackhawk. But the two guys who were apparently responsible for the real creation of the Magnificent Seven were artists Chuck Cuidera and Bob Powell, who worked with him on the SPIRIT SECTION and who wrote and drew the early stories.

The early Blackhawk stories actually looked a lot like "pre-war" Spirit stories, the ones that Eisner did before he was drafted. The panel layout, the characterization, the mix of humor and danger, the dialogue__they all had Eisner's stamp on them.

And they maintained that look and feel through Eisner's tenure, though it was Powell and Cuidera who wrote the stories in the first eleven issues and Chuck Cuidera who drew them. Bob and Chuck were succeeded respectively by Bill Woolfolk and Reed Crandall, and they successfully kicked the feature into gear post_Eisner.

But let's give you a picture of what Military Comics was in the beginning.

Quality Comics, which published Military, was expanding as much as they could before World War II paper rationing froze their output for the duration. Police Comics was only peripherally about police matters. Military took its title more seriously. The book was divided into two halves, an Army Section and a Navy Section. Whether the feature was serious or funny__and many of the features were humor pieces__they were connected in some way to the War.

And, even in the funny features, lead characters could and did get killed.

Military was a fatalistic comic. After reading it, nobody had to be told that war was hell.

Blackhawk was the lead and cover feature for all of Military / Modern's

as I'll kill you someday!"

From there, it is inevitable that the two will meet again. But there was much to be done before then.

The Nazis were busily and efficiently conquering a continent, and preparing to conquer much more. Their forces were simply too much for the Europeans to cope with. Only the sacrifice of many men, and a killing winter, kept them from triumphing over Russia as well.

But, in Quality's world, there suddenly appeared a terrible fighting force of less than ten men. In the air, on the land, there was one cry and one name the Nazis learned to fear, because they heralded death.

The cry was "Hawkaaa!" and the name was *Blackhawk*.

"Like an angel of vengeance, Blackhawk and his men swoop down out of nowhere, their guns belching death and on their lips the dreaded song of the Blackhawks..." Nazi officers were bearded in their lairs. Whole troops of the enemy were wiped out quickly and thoroughly. And Blackhawk's question to each enemy officer was the same: "Where is Von Tepp?"

But one of Blackhawk's agents was captured by Von Tepp, and the Nazi scorned a note his enemy sent, warning him to release the man or be wiped out. Von Tepp stood the man before a firing squad with two others, one of them an English nurse, and prepared to order their deaths. As he bade the riflemen aim, all present heard, from without, a band of men singing:

"Over land, over sea, we fight to make men free,

Of danger we don't care,

We're Blackhawks!"

And into the execution yard strode Blackhawk himself. Dressed in a black pilot's jacket., officer's cap, jodhpurs and boots, his only insignia was a winged pin; the hawk's head would come later. His men, dressed in the same garb, stood on the walls overlooking the yard, their guns aimed at the Nazi squad. Von Tepp resisted, but, after a brief battle, he and his men were subdued. Blackhawk ordered the enemy soldiers blindfolded and taken to "the island", then turned to Von Tepp.

"As for you, my friend...when we get to that island you're going to pay an old debt! ...Involving one bombed farmhouse and two dead kids!" Von Tepp sneered, but we could almost smell his fear through the pulp and ink of the comic page.

On the next page, we got our first look at Blackhawk Island, the well_defended atoll on which Blackhawk's international band of independent warriors was based. Von Tepp was given his choice of two airplanes to use in a death duel against Blackhawk. The dark knight of the air told Von Tepp who he was and why he required vengeance. As all self_respecting villains would do, Von Tepp tampered with Blackhawk's engine before they took off. It mattered little. When Blackhawk found his gas was about to run out, he just rammed Von Tepp's plane.

Both planes crashed spectacularly. From the dual wreckage, Von Tepp climbed out, laughing in triumph. "The swine! I, the great Von Tepp, always win!"

"Not always, Von Tepp!" Blackhawk climbed from the remains of his own plane. Aghast, Von Tepp went for his gun. Blackhawk shot first. Von Tepp crumpled lifeless at his feet.

The caption read, "And so the curtain falls on Von Tepp...but others like him carry on his evil work...and while hate, fear, vengeance, and persecution exist, there will always be work for Blackhawk..." A few panels later, Blackhawk put it more simply: "Ours is a mission of justice and death."

There was certainly enough of both, but it was Blackhawk's justice.

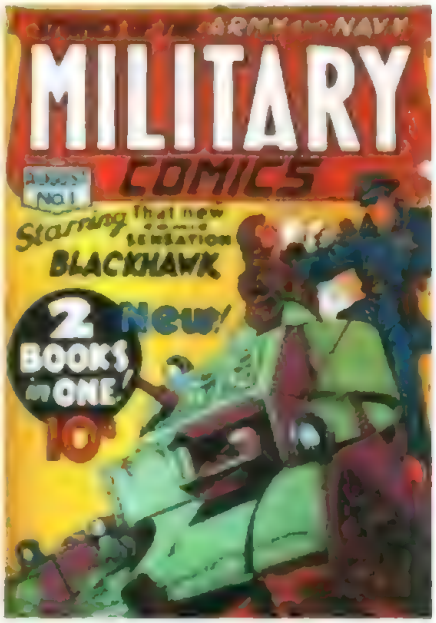
Like The Spirit, Blackhawk was a character that underwent a bit of refinement after his first episode. The big black_and-yellow hawk_head chest emblem first showed up on his uniform with the second issue. The other Blackhawks were an undifferentiated bunch for a few issues. The first story gave us a British Cockney Blackhawk who never appeared again, and named another as Vladim. The latter was called "our Blackhawk designer" in the second issue and was credited with retooling their planes, but he, too, was never really seen after the first episode. Given the Blackhawks' profession, it's safe to assume they died in combat. The early Blackhawks were just faceless men in uniforms, of an indeterminate number.

By the second issue, though, some faces were revealed, and names were assigned to them. On page three, panel 8, Blackhawk introduced them to a guest: "Here are some of my men...each an expert in his field...reading from right to left you see.. .Stanislaus, Andre, Hendrick, Boris, Zeg, and Olaf. ..you will meet the others later..."

About all the origin we ever got on them was what Blackhawk said in that issue: "You can't expect men who have seen their loved ones murdered before their eyes to have or excuse weaknesses."

Most fans are familiar enough with the Blackhawks that we don't have to do too much explanation for each individual member. Stanislaus was the big, strong Polish guy and Blackhawk's right hand man. Andre was the Frenchman who had a way with the ladies. Hendrick (who soon became Hendrickson) was the white_haired senior of the group, either a Dutchman or an anti_Nazi German; in Cold War issues, he was definitely the latter. Olaf was a stalwart Swede. Boris and Zeg were both Russian, and they hung on through most of the first year. But two new Blackhawks were soon added, and John Beardsley, who edited the book after Eisner, may not have been comfortable with nine Blackhawks to keep track of. So Boris and Zeg were dropped without a hint, which certainly made it easier for the Blackhawks to fight Communists in the Fifties.

The cover of Military #2 showed him hanging onto the logo and kicking the crap out of a Nazi soldier who was hip_deep in ocean water. The story, another Eisner / Cuidera effort, treated us to some aerial dogfighting between the Blackhawks and their Axis opponents, soon to be a standard in the strip. They were rescuing a British squadron, and forced one deserter to follow them to Blackhawk Island ("Pilot in Spitfire, follow us or we'll shoot you down!"). On the ground, the young flier threw a punch at Blackhawk, calling his band "air pirates and assassins!" Then he apologized, in best British fashion, but admitted. "You fellows have a terrible reputation on the continent...no one seems to know just what your aims are..."



Within another page, the Black Knights (for such they were called then) were called to yet another mission, to prevent radium for atomic bomb experiments from getting into the Nazis' hands in Paris. The Blackhawks took off. The young flier remained behind, crying at his own cowardice. But, after some fast action in the streets of Paris, the Blackhawks seemed doomed by the onset of a squadron of Nazi planes. In good war_movie fashion, the young Brit turned up in his Spitfire, rammed the Germans, and blew up enough of them for the Blackhawks to make a successful counterattack. Back on Blackhawk Island, they found a last note from him, thanking them for theirexample of bravery. "And, as the morning sun blazes over the horizon, the battle song of the Blackhawks pays tribute to the memory of a coward who was brave..."

The story ended with a 2/3_page blueprint of the new Blackhawk planes, which were identified as modified Grumman Skyrockets. Quality doted on nailing down details of the Blackhawks' existence. Before long, they printed a one_page diagram of Blackhawk Island and provided a one_page sheet_music version of the official Blackhawk song. It was written by the man who would succeed Eisner as Blackhawk writer after about issue #4: Dick French.

But there are two other Blackhawks we have to introduce before we go much further. The first of them showed up in issue #3,. in "The Doomed Battalion". He was the comic relief of the bunch, as stereotyped as they came, but lovable nonetheless. On the splash page, seven Blackhawks strode forward towards us, and Stanislaus and Andre held between them by his arms an eighth newcomer, a short, fat, fiercely_cursing Chinese fellow in green, yellow, and red. Eisner was always fond of ethnic humor, and he'd just given the Blackhawks their version of The Spirit's Ebony White...Chop-Chop!

After six_and_a_half word balloons, Chop_Chop finally got down to decipherable dialogue: "Lemme go! Missee Ann in much danger!" He calmed down enough to relate his story: Ann, a Red Cross nurse whom the Blackhawks had helped in issue #1, had run afoul of Markov, a "food profiteer" in Yugoslavia. Now the Nazis had invaded. Markov had turned traitor. And Ann, one of Chop-Chop's old friends, was in harm's way. Chop_Chop pieced together a plane from components of wrecks, and there he was.

The Blackhawks tricked Chop_Chop into tying himself up to keep him out of danger. Then, amidst many more Chinese imprecations, they took off, rescued Ann, blew up a dam in the Drina Valley, and drowned a whole bunch of Nazis. They also destroyed a batch of German planes in a dogfight, and the gauletier of the area personally gunned down Markov for bringing the Blackhawks down on their necks.

But it wasn't all hearts and flowers. A remainder of the German force saw Blackhawk on a mountainside and opened up on him. Andre, also on the scene, thrust Blackhawk out of danger and took several bullets himself. Realizing he was dying, Andre caused an avalanche with his own body, sealing the Nazi troopers in a cave forever. "Farewell, mes amis!" yelled Andre at the last.

He didn't come back at the end of the story. Or the next. Or the next.

Blackhawk readers were getting the idea: war was played for keeps. And even in comics, the good guys could die.

The Blackhawk lineup wasn't stabilized until after their first year of publication. It was agreed that the Blackhawks had to be an international band, whose members were from countries suppressed by the Nazis. (Artist Howard Nostrand has testified that it was Bob Powell, whose real name was something like Stanislaus Pulaski, who influenced the decision to make Blackhawk Polish.) The Blackhawks' lineup, for their first eleven issues, went something like this:

#1: Blackhawk, Baker, at least six others

#2: Blackhawk, Stanislaus, Andre, Hendrickson, Boris, Zeg, Olaf, Vladim

#3: Blackhawk, Stanislaus, Andre, Hendrickson, Boris, Zeg, Olaf, Chop_Chop

#4_5: Blackhawk, Stanislaus, Hendrickson, Boris, Zeg, Olaf, Chop_Chop

#6-7: Blackhawk, Stanislaus, Hendrickson, Zeg, Olaf, Chop-Chop

#8: Blackhawk, Stanislaus, Olaf, Chop_Chop

#9: Blackhawk, Stanislaus, Hendrickson, Olaf, Chop_Chop, Andre

#10: Blackhawk, Stanislaus, Hendrickson, Olaf, Chop-Chop, Andre, Zeg

#11: Blackhawk, Stanislaus, Hendrickson, Olaf, Chop_Chop, Andre, Chuck

From that time to this, the Blackhawk lineup has remained stable, save for latecomers like Lady Blackhawk, a one_shot newcomer or two, and Boris, who turned up again in 1976 for an issue or so.

Undoubtedly, you've noticed Andre's name on issue #10's roster and Chuck's name on #11. Here's how Andre made his comeback:

The splash page of #10's Blackhawk story showed a muscular figure, shirtless, in black jodhpurs, breaking the Blackhawk logo in two with his powerful arms. The man wore a metal mask, with Viking_like horns on the sides. The opening caption read,

"A ghost from the past glides into the life of the Blackhawks and runs riot through the halls of the Nazi stronghold as the Man In The Iron Mask!! WHO IS HE?"

The story, one of the better Blackhawk opuses, started with a scene on a rainy night in the Yugoslavian mountains, within sight of a castle. The six Blackhawks stood in a memorial service for Andre, who had apparently perished there months before, to save the lives of his comrades. "And so today, on what should have been his last birthday, we pay a last tribute...gulp...to a true Blackhawk! Andre!" Blackhawk threw a funeral wreath off the side of the mountain. We couldn't tell if he had tears in his eyes, or if it was just the rain.

The storm was making flight hazardous, so the sextet took refuge in the castle nearby. Soon they were met by a mysterious man in an iron mask, who advised them, "Blackhawk! You must leave here at once! . . . You are in Nazi regional headquarters! Go and luck be with you!" Then he vanished behind sliding walls. But his message was a little late, as a Nazi guard troop poured down a staircase and attacked Blackhawk and Olaf. The heroes were finally taken prisoner.

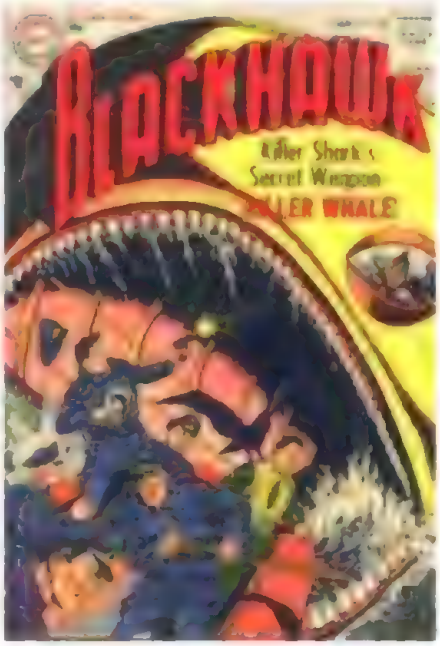
Blackhawk's captor, Gen. Von Ezel, was plenty scared of the iron_masked man. When he learned that his opponent still lived, he shot the man who had claimed to have killed him. Then he sent Blackhawk off to be whipped. The other Blackhawks were put in a deathtrap. It looked pretty grim, although Blackhawk himself took the lashing without complaint.

Into the breach leapt the Iron Masked Man. After nailing the Nazis with a falling chandelier (right___that old

trick again), he freed Blackhawk, led him to the place where his men were held, and helped liberate them as well. But he would not reveal his identity to Blackhawk. (Evidently he'd spent some time covering up his accent, which, for a Blackhawk, would be a mighty task indeed.) He bade the Blackhawks leave, saying that he was one "who almost...er...who would give his life for you!" They did, but the Iron Mask got captured himself.

Outside, things came together for Blackhawk: "One who would give his life for you! He said__and that voice was so familiar-_I__Good heavens__could it be?" With that, they broke right in again, saved the Iron Mask from torture, beat up on the Nazis, and confronted their benefactor. "Men, I may be wrong, but I believe the man in this mask is___ANDRE!"

Confronted with the truth, the Iron Mask fessed up. "Yes! I am Andre but I didn't want you to know! You must not see__I lived through that landslide...but my face...I__I've had to wear this mask!" Reassured by Blackhawk that his disfigurement didn't matter, Andre lifted the visor of his helmet. Thoughtfully, the artist blacked out the sight. The Blackhawks manfully concealed their revulsion.



But all was not lost. Blackhawk undertook a one_man foray into Germany, liberated from a concentration camp the one plastic surgeon good enough to do the job, and brought him back to see Andre. When the doctor, Fritz Von Rath, saw Andre's pan, he cracked up. "What a funny face!! I like that! It makes me laugh!" And he did. Andre leaned against the side of a panel in anguish. They took Von Rath away to get him over his case of the giggles, and Blackhawk told Andre to buck up.

"Don't worry, Andre! The horrors of the concentration camp have weakened his mind! But we'll take care of him...treat him like a baby! In a month he'll be well_-and so will you!" The story ended with a tier of three panels, three possibilities: one, Andre's smiling face; two, an iron mask that Andre might have to wear forever; and three, a silhouette of Andre's face with a question mark inside. The scumbags were going to make us wait another month!

The next issue opened with a splash of the Blackhawks encouraging Von Rath to do the job on Andre. "I'll try, but after all, I'm crazy, you know!" confessed the surgeon. "Must be successful," warned Chop_Chop, brandishing a cleaver, "or Chop-Chop operate on YOU with this!!"

Von Rath did indeed operate, but Andre's face was swathed in bandages and it would be two weeks before he was sufficiently healed for them to see his visage. When the wraps came off, Andre had a new face, but it wasn't his own. The half_cracked Dr. Von Rath had given him a face that had haunted him, that of Baron Von Zern, the Nazi general who had forced Rath's daughter Barbara to be his bride and then threw him into a concentration camp.

But nobody had called off the war, and Von Zern's Arab forces in Libya were menacing a British outpost. When the Blackhawks learned of it, they took to the skies. Andre went with them, a Blackhawk once again. It took some doing, but Andre clouted Von Zern, masqueraded as him, and enabled the good guys to defeat their foes. Barbara Von Zern was around, too, but she mistook Andre for her hated husband and tried to knife him. Andre and Blackhawk restrained the wildcat, stuffed her in a big mailsack, threw her over Andre's shoulder, and took her back to Blackhawk Island with them.

Once reunited with his daughter, Von Rath was a new man. He reoperated on Andre and gave him his old face again. While recuperating, Andre made time with Barbara__there have been, after all, weirder courtships than one which begins with being stuffed in a mailsack__and, at the end of the story, announced their betrothal. The two kissed, and the Blackhawks cheered.

But she never showed up again, and their engagement was never mentioned afterward. Apparently, Andre would just rather be with the boys. And, after all, with his regular face he never seemed to have problems getting girls.

Chuck, the final Blackhawk, was introduced by name in issue #11, in an open_panel seven_head shot that finally named the canonical Blackhawks: Blackhawk, Olaf, Chop_Chop, Hendrickson, Stanislaus, Andre, and Chuck himself. In his first appearance, Chuck had black hair. Since both Blackhawk and Andre also had black hair, Chuck soon became a redhead. He was named for artist Chuck Cuidera and included in the squadron because they needed an American in there amongst all the foreigners. Best of all, Chuck was later revealed to be a Texan. With that bit of information, we could be assured: Hitler was doomed.

Military #11 was apparently one of the first issues published post_Pearl Harbor. The cover, one of the best of the series, showed Blackhawk grabbing an American flag tied to a rifle from the hand of a soldier who had just been shot by the enemy. The scene was at sea, and the message seemed to be: one man may fall, but the Stars and Stripes shall not. In the story, the Dark Knights were debating in their island HQ whether or not to aid America in its fight in the Pacific. Most of the Blackhawks were from Nazi_conquered nations of Europe, and Olaf opined that America could take care of itself. But Chop_Chop, whose homeland had been fighting Japan for a long time, yelled, "Phooey!!! Too much jaw-clappin' . . .Amelica__only country in world where man. can live like hooman_being__is threatened! Okey_dokey___you talk! Me ploud to help Amelica! Chop_Chop go to fight! Goom_bye!"

He slammed the door. The Blackhawks looked at each other. Then, Blackhawk said, "Well. boys...I guess we'd better get started!"

And so they did, in an adventure that sent them against Japanese forces in the air and on the sea. and reunited Chop_Chop with his girlfriend, the similarly_shaped Lotus Petal. There wasn't a lot of plot, but the battle scenes were great.

The next issue, #12, brought in the most famous Blackhawk artist of all: Reed Crandall. Possibly Quality's greatest artist, Crandall was the master of realism, with figures and locales .so well_drawn that everybody in the Quality bullpen crowded around to see his stuff when he brought it in. That held up work, so the editor made Crandall quit coming to the office.

But the story itself, and its sequel in #29, were among the most offbeat and interesting Blackhawk tales of all. "The Curse of Xanukhara" opened with a symbolic splash of the Blackhawks amidst a crashed plane, battling foes atop a giant leather satchel with the faces of a mysterious blonde woman in a pillbox hat and a long_haired, bearded man who looked like a Greek deity billowing up from a cloud behind them. On the next page, the bearded man, whose name was never revealed, spoke directly to us from the darkness:

"Don't be afraid, reader...come closer...closer...That's better! Now, listen closely! Somewhere in the world today there exists a leather briefcase, the contents of which are so priceless that the entire plan of human existence will be disrupted upon their disclosure... The outcome of the present war depends upon that briefcase! In fact...the 1 billion years of evolution are but a chapter in the gigantic plan!!"

We weren't clued into what gigantic plan this was, but the bearded narrator hung around for the rest of the page, detailing the journey of the briefcase. The first guy we saw with it had murdered to get it. He was stabbed to death from behind, two panels later. (Narrator: "Aaah! There you have it!! A nice, clean job!") Then Blackhawk showed up a couple of panels later, beat up the killer, and took the briefcase himself. Thbe narrator excused himself, saying that he'd be around.

Blackhawk turned up in the office of Major Brandon, in the Washington, D. C. War Department. The major had a bunch of codebooks on his desk, and was ranting, "**Xanukhara!** Doesn't anyone know what it means? ...The code experts can't fathom it, but death always accompanies it!" Blackhawk handed him the briefcase, or tried to. An orderly grabbed it, dived through a closed window, and fell ten stories to his death. Blackhawk and the major found his body on the pavement, without the briefcase. One word was written beside him: XANUKHARA.

As it turned out, Xanukhara was the name of the beautiful blonde lady in the pillbox hat, a menacing femme-fatale spy who hopped the globe, left her name printed on cigarette butts, and murdered the last man between her and the briefcase with an axe in the back. "Men!" she sneered over the corpse. "Pah!! They never reckon with Xanukhara!"

In the meantime, the Blackhawks got into a fiery battle in the streets of Tokyo, flew out with singed feathers, and made it to China before their borrowed planes conked out. Blackhawk was seduced in an alley by a beautiful brunette in the pay of Xanukhara. "I

issue #13, Eisner and French had bowed out, leaving the editorial duties to John Beardsley and the scripting to Bill Woolfolk. The stories would never again had quite that Spirit-like touch. But Woolfolk made up for it with action- and character-packed sagas that kept Blackhawk screaming through the rest of World War II, and beyond.

The first Woolfolk and Crandall opus started out with the caption, "This is the story of the hunter and the hunted! ...A saga of a cruel ruthless fiend, **The Butcher!!** ...See Blackhawk pitted against the worst villain who ever lived! ...See Blackhawk, the most heroic hero of this bloody war match wits with the monster...**THE BUTCHER!"**

What Bill lacked in style, he made up with enthusiasm. And this was one of his early stories.

Anyway, the Butcher, who looked like a cross between Erich Von Stroheim and Al Capone, was a Nazi gauleiter whose usual pursuit was setting up and watching mass executions from the window of his palatial lair, while pondering, "Anyone would think I am a leper from the way these natives avoid me! What have I done to deserve this treatment?" (Maybe if he changed his mouthwash...)

The Countess Elsia, "the most beautiful woman in Europe", refused his advances, jumped off a cliff to elude his men, and, half-dead, was picked up by a roaming Blackhawk the next morning. The Butcher watched the deed with binoculars. "I would know that plane anywhere in the world!! Verdammte!! I have an old score to settle with Blackhawk!"

Elsia lived long enough to tell Blackhawk of the Butcher. At her gravesite, Blackhawk raised his fist to the skies and swore to avenge her. The Blackhawks interrupted the Butcher in the midst of directing the slaughter of 887 villagers. In revenge, the dastard took to his plane and strafed the Blackhaws, all but their leader. Blackhawk went to the air and faced off with the Butcher, but soon found he had met his match.

"I see your radio is open, Blackhawk," snarled the Butcher through his mike. "Well, I am Baron Von Tepp...the brother of the man you killed! I've been waiting for this day of revenge, pig!" The Butcher shot Blackhawk down, watched the crash, saw no one emerge, and flew off to tell the Fuhrer the good news. Hitler gratefully gave Von Tepp a month's leave.

As it turned out, that wasn't exactly a gift.

After celebrating his victory in various cities throughout the Continent, the Butcher looked through a window in Belgrade and saw a cloaked man with the face of Blackhawk. Terrified, he ran and jumped the next train for Athens, Greece. In the meantime we learned that Blackhawk had survived the crash. He had been rescued and nursed back to health by Chop-Chop. But he believed his men had been killed by Von Tepp, and he swore to make the Butcher pay.

While pursuing Von Tepp's train, Blackhawk and Chop-Chop monitored a German radio broadcast that said the other Blackhawks were also alive. But they were slated to die by a firing squad on the morrow. The two free Blackhawks soared off in their plane, machine-gunned the firing squad, and rescued their fellows. Blackhawk, still bitter about losing Von Tepp's trail, kept the news to himself.

But the Butcher fell victim to paranoia. In every shadow, in every cloud formation, he saw—or feared to see—Blackhawk. Von Tepp ran from country to country, trying to flee his imagined pursuer. Finally, in an Arab land, the Butcher saw a shrouded beggar, shrieked, and ran into the desert. When he could run no more, he fell and died of exposure. The vultures dropped for their lunch.

In the last panel, we switched to Blackhawk Island, where Blackhawk regretfully fessed up to his men that he'd had to let Von Tepp get away.

Hardly a disappointment!

The Black Knights continued their anti-Axis crusade throughout the war years, giving Hitler and Tojo fits. Blackhawk met with nasty villains and seductive villainesses; he smashed the first and rejected the second. Bill Woolfolk handled much of the early scripting, being spelled by Manly Wade Wellman, Joe Millard, and others. Reed Crandall got drafted and left the series after issue #22. He was replaced by able craftsmen such as John Cassone, Alex Kotzky, Bill Ward, and Bill Quackenbush. With #46, Crandall was back. He filled the bulk of the remaining Blackhawk stories in the title, with Cuidera inking many of his efforts.

There were more good stories and good characters in the long saga than we can write about in our alloted space. There was King Cobra and his Rattlesnake Squadron, an Axis ver-

sion of the Blackhawks that took two issues to be put down. There were the sexy mystery-women Tondelayo and Fear. There were uncostumed but distinguished foes such as Von Volter the Terrible, the Fox, and the Thunderer. The Blackhawks met them all, and sent the villains packing...if they let them live.

One question might arise: was there ever a woman, among all the women Blackhawk encountered during his long crusade, that really turned his head, for whom he might chuck it all, and rest his wings forever?

Indeed there was.

Her name was Eve Rice.

She appeared in a trilogy that stretched through **Military Comics** #34-36, with art probably by Bill Quackenbush. The story began with Blackhawk and his men looking through a pile of American picture magazines. In one of them, to their astonishment, they found pictures of themselves. The photographer's by-line was Eve Rice. "A **woman**!" exclaimed Chuck, Olaf, and Hendrickson in unison.

Since the Blackhawks never gave photo ops to anyone, it took a little thinking for them to recall an Allied plane with strange markings that had followed them from afar on several missions. Just as they doped that out, a plane buzzed them and dropped a note. It said that the Japanese had discovereed the locale of Blackhawk Island and were on their way to do them no good. It was signed "E. R."

The Black Knights took to their planes and thrashed the oncoming Japs. When Chuck was in a tight spot, a mystery newcomer saved his hash. Naturally, it was Eve Rice, who turned out to be a crack combat pilot as well as a pro photographer. "A g-g-girl!" stammered Blackhawk when he learned her identity.

"I've had other men say that with more enthusiasm," said the blonde beauty.

"You'll never hear men say 'Scram!' with greater enthusiasm, sister!" retorted Blackhawk. Things weren't exactly helped when Eve admitted she'd told the Japanese the location of Blackhawk Island, to get some great night-fight photos for her magazine. Blackhawk threw her across his knee and prepared to give her a sound spanking. Chuck halted him, and insisted he be a gentleman.

"Never wear your cap while spanking a lady!" he said, removing Blackhawk's chapeau. "Now, go ahead!"

Eve escaped by cuddling up to Blackhawk and saying that, even if he whacked her, she'd still worship him. Blackhawk, his sweat ducts on and running at capacity, told Eve to cut it out. Then he stood up, throwing her on her kiester, and told the boys, "I give up! Get her out of here before I go raving mad!"

But Eve protested, asking to stay long enough to get some closeups. They obliged. Since they had to find a new island base, they stuck her in a closet, locked the door, and took off. Blackhawk opined that she could kick out the door and get to her plane, but

it would give them time to find a new island...and to ditch her.

Things didn't work out that way. The Japanese tried a second run on Blackhawk Island, and the peerless pilots had to come back and save Eve's pretty hide. After the job was done, Blackhawk faced off with Eve and said, "I've a notion to—"

"Why don't you?" coaxed Miss Rice.

There was a one-panel freeze, wordless, with Blackhawk's and Eve's lips only inches apart...

Then the spell passed. Blackhawk shook it off, and told her to get out. Eve said that she'd always get her way, and, at any rate, she couldn't leave just then. Her plane had been wasted by the Japs! After a choice set of expletives, Blackhawk agreed to put her up. "But only until we can dump you in a safe and civilized spot!" Eve

smiled and agreed, knowingly. That was the end of issue #34's story.

Eve was still their guest in the next issue. Their attitude towards her had mellowed somewhat. But Eve was still a newshen, and deliberately got herself involved in a Bermuda Triangle-style mess at a place called Shipwreck Island. Blackhawk went to rescue her, and the other Blackhawks loyally followed.

It turned out to be a plot of the Japanese Navy, and Eve had enough moxie to slap the daylights out of an enemy sub commander when he propositioned her. The Blackhawks came, and a final battle ensued. The commander snarled, "I will not die alone!", and tried to aim his gun at Eve. She responded with a right cross that sent him into the drink.

The victorious Blackhawks crowded around Eve, concerned for her safety. "Now I know why Blackhawk considers you to be the finest group of fighting men on Earth!", she said, marvelling at their prowess. Blackhawk, who had gotten wounded, was brought in on a stretcher. Eve promised to nurse him back to health. "You will not!" responded Blackhawk. "You're not even coming back to Blackhawk Island! Don't argue! I've made up my mind! No! No! NO!"

The last panel showed Blackhawk back in bed on their island, with Eve changing his bandages. Stanislaus grinned at the readers and admitted, "Well, he didn't say **positively!**"

Things were apparently warming up between Blackhawk and Eve Rice. She'd managed an unprecedented two-issue stay in the feature. What was to become of her? Would she remain as a regular, perhaps as the first Lady Blackhawk? Would she heroically die in batle, trying to get that last spectacular shot? Or...worst of all...would the editor and writers simply forget her as a plot device that had run its course?

Issue #36 told the tale, with "The Cult of the Wailing Tiger".

The main storyline concerned a mysterious cult of assassins in China, who were actually being led in anti-Allied operations by a Japanese spy. The more interesting subplot concerned Eve Rice. She stepped from a meeting room in which they were discussing their latest assignment. Immediately, Blackhawk noted how his men transformed themselves into perfect gentlemen in her presence. "They're stealing each other's thunder...to impress her!" he mused, mentally. And she didn't help matters when she stowed away on Blackhawk's plane, and overheard him mumbling about her attractiveness.

After Blackhawk appeared to have been killed during the adventure, Eve was grief-stricken. "Don't feel bitter!" Hendrickson consoled her. "Remember, we luffed him, too!" But a page later, we saw a sailboat moving away from Blackhawk Island at night. The six remaining Blackhawks awoke the next morning to find a note thanking them for their hospitality, but admitting, "I would only cause trouble by staying on! Perhaps we will meet again!"

Before they could sort out their feelings, the Blackhawks got a radio message from their trapped leader. They took to their planes, defeated the bad guys, and liberated Blackhawk. But that wasn't the end of the story.

The last four panels took us back to Blackhawk Island, where Andre played guitar and joined Chuck, Hendrickson, Olaf, and Stanislaus in singing the Blackhawks' battle song: "We fight to make men free...we're Blackhawks!" But Blackhawk himself sat and faced away from his men, staring into space.

His thought balloon betrayed his feelings. "She's gone! I wonder if I'll ever see her again! It's for the best! She only caused jealousy between us! The Blackhawks must come first! ...But I'll miss her, just the same!"

Chuck clapped his pensive mentor on the shoulder and bade him join their martial carol. Blackhawk stood amongst his men, in a semicircle of brotherhood around the guitar-playing Andre, and sang as lustily as the rest of them...to forget a woman, and to remember what he was. "Cry down with tyranny! We're here to set men free! We're Blackhawks!"

And we never saw Eve Rice again.

In eight more issues' time, we were at the end of World War II. **Military Comics**, in mid-1945, was faced with the necessity of change. Soldiers who had won their war and come back to the victory parades now had to piece together new lives after demobilization. **Military** had to do much the same thing.

So, with issue #44 (October 1945), **Military** became **Modern Comics**. Just to make sure the readers knew it was the same book, Quality put the headline "Formerly **Military Comics**" on top of every cover for 26 issues. By that time, they figured we'd gotten it.

title **Modern Comics** worked, in that it was not tied to a restraining concept. It only signified that the book was being retooled for the postwar world. Also, like **Whiz** or **Master**, **Modern** was sufficiently meaningless in title so that a future name change wouldn't be necessitated. If the book had remained **Military Comics**, it probably would have had to focus on what wars remained in the world. There were plenty of them, but in 1945 we didn't want to know of them.

At any rate, **Modern Comics** was remade into the very model of a postwar Quality comic book: a comic with a serious cover feature and a whole bunch of funny strips in the back. The Army and Navy sections vanished. Choo Choo, Ezra, and Will Bragg replaced the likes of the Sniper. Even Private Dogtag got out of the army in issue #49, became Ex-Private Dogtag for the next three issues, and hung on as just plain Dogtag for the next 31 issues.

But Blackhawk was enough.

With Reed Crandall's return as penciller, often being inked by Chuck Cuidera, Blackhawk didn't lack fine artistry in the postwar years. The stories sometimes lagged a bit, but were always competent. Our heroes had to do without Nazis, but they made up for it by becoming global troubleshooters in countries nobody in the real world had ever heard of.

It happened like this:

By issue #48, neither the readers, the editors, or the Blackhawks could avoid the fact that World War II was over. They acknowledged the fact with a splash page. The Black Knights stood victorious over two dead enemies covered with a Japanese flag, the sun symbolically setting in the background. Overhead flew a dove with an olive branch. The caption intoned:

*The dawn of a new era is bringing **peace** to the world and **freedom** to the oppressed! The Blackhawks have contributed well to the fight! ...And now their work is done!*

Or...is it? What lies ahead for the brave and heroic Blackhawks?

We segued into a panel of the Blackhawks clinking their beer steins in a salute to freedom and victory. Hendrickson demanded a song from Andre. The Frenchman took his guitar in hand and started the familiar, "Over land, over sea, we fight to make men free...we're Black..."

He stopped dead.

"Pardon—I cannot sing! Ze fighting is finish...so is our wartime brotherhood!"

A glumness attack settled over the seven men. "I understand," said Blackhawk, putting a hand on Andre's shoulder. "Peace brings us to the parting! Our job's done...we'll separate and go home now!"

Hendrickson: "Ya! Zis old Dutchman vill pack his grip!"

Stanislaus: "Much must be done to rebuild my Polish home!"

Chop-Chop: "Chop-Chop go findee old girl fliend in Chungking!"

Andre: "Paris calls me, oui!"

Olaf: "And ay build fishing boat in Norway!"

Chuck finished it off: "You and I head for the States, huh, Blackhawk?"

Blackhawk couldn't say it. Instead, he said, "Let's talk about separating tomorrow! Tonight, we're still Blackhawks together!" Everybody was all in favor of that.

But just as Chop-Chop was taking the beer mugs to the tap for a refill, their shortwave radio gave out a call for help from Peroo Island. As it happened, a beautiful blonde crookess named Elosa and her men were taking over the island to cash in on its mineral rights. They were also shooting anybody that disagreed. The Blackhawks intervened, clobbered the wrongdoers, did the inevitable rejection of Elosa's charms, and had a fine old time.

Then, back on Blackhawk Island, the scene took place that we all knew would happen. "Well, gang, what do you say?" asked Blackhawk. "We don't split up after all?"

"No, by Yupiter!" quoth Olaf. "We ban stick togedder for more excitement!"

Blackhawk lifted his stein and rahrahed his boys. "We came together for war... Well, now we'll stick together for peace and the defeat of all evil and injustice!" Andre capped it off with a new verse of their battle song: "In times of war and peace / Adventures never cease / We're Blackhawks!"

And so it was. Just in time, too, because their solo comic, **Blackhawk**, was just becoming a going concern then, after one issue being published two years previously. But that's meat for another article, perhaps.

Bad guys ran from international pirates like Grin the Grabber (#58) to costumed villainesses like Madame Butterfly (#78) to tyrants such as Vorn and Skoska who just needed overthrowing (#87 and 80). The Blackhawks put the kibosh on Plambar, the most ancient evil city on Earth (#51), invaded the fortress of the Mephisophelian villain Fiendish (#66), and, just to show that **Planet Comics** had nothing on them, fought villains who apparently came from the Moon (#64). The last turned out to be the Red Dragons, a Chinese crime cult, in disguise.

To make up for that, the Blackhawks really did go to the moon, in issue #99. They were chosen by an international team of scientists to head up a lunar expedition in an experimental rocket. The Blackhawks made the landing safely, scooping Armstrong, Aldrin, and Collins by 19 years. But they'd gotten scooped themselves by a team of Red spies led by the evil Zorak and the beautiful but deadly Telga, whose spacesuit didn't cover her legs.

After a brief conflict and some intrigue, though, the villains saw the light, renounced their evil ways, and pledged to help the democracies establish a moon base. The Black Knights rocketed back to Earth, singing, "Thought wide and airless space / We dare foes face to face / We're Blackhawks!"

Well, wouldn't it have been boring if they'd just picked up moon rocks?

The most fascinating postwar character, fittingly, was a woman. Her name was Fear, and she was a girl somebody like the Sniper could have been quite comfortable with. Her introduction, in **Modern** #49, went like this: A caption read, *"Allow us to introduce you to this young lady—known by the name of **Fear!**"* Fear was a mysterious brunette beauty in a low-cut yellow shirt, black pants, open-toed shoes, and a brown cape with a hood. She completed the ensemble with a machine gun on her hip. "How do you do?" she said, facing the reader. "Will you excuse me? I've a little business to transact!"

Within seconds, her business partner showed up, on the run from something. Unfortunately, he had run in the wrong direction. He saw Fear, shrieked, and got a chestful of bullets from her Tommy gun. Fear nonchalantly stood over the corpse with her smoking weapon in hand, lit a cigarette, and asked us, "Do you mean that you watched what I did? But you wouldn't tell anyone—That would be embarrassing—" She shot us a glance over her shoulder as she walked off. "Even disastrous—to **you!**"

This may be hard to believe, folks, but Fear really was a heroine.

Fear and the Blackhawks crossed paths in a small European country called Zorania. She proved to be the daughter of a man named Renarr, who had been framed for an assassination plot and wrongly executed. Fear was out to clear her daddy's name, and she did it by putting holes in the bad guys who framed him. She explained to Blackhawk their difference in opinion: "Life in prison...a little too good for them! Protection, really, from what they deserve!"

But she did rescue Blackhawk from a deathtrap. He was locked in a cage with a giant ape, and she machine-gunned the anthropoid. Then she gave Blackhawk the means to free himself, but made sure she had a head start. That almost gave her time to kill the last conspirators. Blackhawk and his men hurried up enough to grab the dastards and learn of Ranarr's innocence from their lips.

Then Fear killed the baddies.

Blackhawk said that he would clear her father's name, and offered to take her along for the session. "I'd better not!", murmured Fear. "After all, I haven't operated within the law! Perhaps we'll meet again!" They did, in **Blackhawk** #22 and several issues thereafter. And he was very, very careful around her.

But times got harder for **Modern Comics**, and for "heroic" comics as a genre, towards 1950. **Modern** shrunk down to 36 pages. Reed Crandall left, and his successors, though competent, were not as good as himself or as Dick Dillin, who handled Blackhawk in his own title. With sales sagging, Quality simply lopped off a batch of their superhero anthologies circa 1950 and upped their production of titles like **Marmaduke Mouse** and **Candy**.

Modern Comics #102, the last issue, featured a Blackhawk tale that had the heroes preventing an outbreak of war between two pseudo-European nations within a 72-hour deadline. There was a Harry Sahle Ezra story, a Gill Fox Torchy number, a two-page Blackhawk text story, a Jonesy joke page by Bernard Dibble, the last Will Bragg story, and, to round things out, a Will Eisner **Spirit** reprint. The page count went up to 52 pages for this last hurrah.

Then **Modern Comics**, nee' **Military Comics**, was gone.

Blackhawk survived unimpaired in his own comic book, a solid enough seller to continue through 1957 when it was picked up without a break by DC upon Quality's demise. **Blackhawk**'s original run continued through 1968 and the title has been periodically revived by DC several times since then. We're never without the Blackhawks for very long.

But it all started with **Military Comics**. And if you want to know why the Blackhawks have survived this long...that's where you have to go.

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